

Shirley Maymington

Newsletter

January 1976

Blissymbolics
Communication
Foundation

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BLISSYMBOLICS COMMUNICATION FOUNDATION

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The purpose of this newsletter is to publish articles and news items concerning the Bliss Symbol System which utilizes visual symbols as a substitute to verbal communication for physically handicapped children without speech.

SUBSCRIPTIONS for the remaining two issues of Volume 2 are still available and may be obtained by sending a cheque for \$3.00 to the following address.
A few back copies of Volume 2, #2 are available at no extra charge.

Blissymbolics Communication Foundation
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Toronto, Ontario. M4G 2L1

ARTICLES for the newsletter should be sent to:

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FROM THE EDITOR

This newsletter should have been in your hands last December but the Canada-wide mail strike brought unexpected delays. Contributions for the issue have been trickling in since Christmas. Trickling is, unfortunately, the correct word. I would remind you, dear readers, that the newsletter is solely dependent on your contributions and I urge you to sit down and write a few lines. Don't hide your light under a bushel! Seriously, we are anxious to share ideas, successes and failures; articles and anecdotes of any length would be appreciated. Sincere thanks are given to those who do contribute - many of them on a regular basis.

... ..

The workshop held in Kitchener on October 4th was attended by over 60 people and proved to be entertaining as well as educational. We were first treated to a presentation given by Mrs. Grace Skanes, Kindergarten teacher at the Kitchener-Waterloo Rotary Crippled Children's Centre. Grace has a unique approach in teaching Symbols to the verbal as well as non-verbal children in her classroom. Many teaching aids were available for inspection and some of the participants considered this to be the most valuable function of the workshop.

Later in the morning, we divided into four smaller groups, according to individual interests, to discuss one of the following:

- a) Parent Involvement
- b) Symbols in Institutional Settings
- c) Battle of the Disciplines - Who Should Instruct?
- d) What Do You Do When You Don't Have Equipment!

After lunch a panel of experts discussed one of the thorniest problems in symbol instruction - that of syntax. Two of the arguments put forth one included in this newsletter. Following a question period, the general consensus appeared to be that there is no one syntax correct for symbol usage but that a good model is essential. The two articles mentioned above will give you more detail on this subject.

Our guest speaker for the day was Dr. Audrey Bienenstock, a resident in Psychiatry at the McMaster University Medical Centre in Hamilton. Her topic was "Psychiatric Counselling Through Symbols." Dr. Bienenstock has provided counselling to school-age symbol students and in sharing her experiences with us, made us all aware of the many emotional factors affecting the non-verbal child.

More small group discussions then took place on the following topics:

- i) Intergration of the Single Symbol User
- ii) Symbols for the Retarded
- iii) Symbols for Pre-Schoolers
- iv) Symbols for the Adolescent

The workshop ended at 6:00 pm after a busy but enjoyable day. In answer to the question "What did you find most helpful?" comment on the evaluation forms included:

- practical suggestions and integration of symbols into total school programme
- the chance to talk to others involved in symbol instruction
- listening to Dr. Bienenstock; much food for thought

- small discussion groups, talking with other disciplines
- panel on syntax, made one think again about why we are teaching symbols.
- the sharing of teaching methodology and materials

... ..

You may not be aware of some of the excellent materials available from the Blissymbolics Communication Foundation. For your information you will find herein an order form listing the items and prices. If you wish to order any of the material, please detach the page, complete and send to the B.C.F. in Toronto.

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The next newsletter will be published in March, 1976. Please send your contributions to me by February 29th.

Barbara Rush
Editor



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BLISSYMBOLICS
COMMUNICATION
FOUNDATION

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Canada M4G 2L1
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ORDER FORM (PRE-PAYMENT OF ORDERS VALUED AT \$25.00 OR LESS WOULD BE APPRECIATED)

SOLD TO: _____ DATE: _____

QTY.	INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS	UNIT PRICE	TOTAL
	Teaching Guideline	\$ 4.00	
	Syntax Supplement no. 1	\$ 2.50	
	Provisional Dictionary	\$ 2.50	
	Purchased as Group of 3	\$ 8.50	
	Set of 30 Individual Introductory Symbols	\$ 3.00	
	100 Vocabulary Display	\$ 4.00	
	200 Vocabulary Display	\$ 5.00	
	400 Vocabulary Display	\$ 6.00	
	Purchased as Group of 4	\$16.50	
	SPECIMEN KIT (7 items above)	\$25.00	
	Semantography, by C.K. Bliss	\$28.00	
	Book to Film, "Mr. Symbol Man", by C.K. Bliss	5.00	
	Symbol Secrets, by S. McNaughton	\$ 6.00	
	PAPERS:		
	The First Application of Blissymbolics..	\$ 1.00	
	History and Development, 1971-1974		
	Considerations in Assessing a Child's	\$.75	
	Communication Needs (included in 1975		
	Teaching Guideline)		
	SPECIAL ORDERS (6 weeks delivery)		
	Colour Coding of Displays		
	for 100 Display	\$ 2.00	
	for 200 Display	\$ 4.00	
	for 400 Display	\$ 4.50	
	Portable, folding, laminated Display	\$15.00	
	with handle, (IN ADDITION to cost of		
	1) basic display, and 2) colour coding).		
	HANDLING CHARGE FOR EACH ORDER	\$ 1.00	\$ 1.00
	TOTAL:		\$

N.B. New Stamps for users of 1974 versions of 100, 200, and 400 displays are available free of charge on request.

NOTES FROM THE BLISSYMBOLICS COMMUNICATION FOUNDATION

We are happy to be publishing the first Newsletter of 1976. We hope it will be followed by many more issues, with an ever-growing range of symbol activities being reported by symbol-users and instructors. As our cover indicates, the Newsletter is a gathering of information - dependent on people in the field of symbol communication writing about their activities with symbols and sharing their experiences in symbol usage. It is not intended as a report on Blissymbolic Communication Foundation activities and as such, it may present points of view which are not necessarily in keeping with the policy of the Blissymbolic Communication Foundation, regarding symbol usage. Publications such as the Bulletin, Teaching Guidelines, Syntax Supplement are the vehicles through which the Blissymbolic Communication Foundation will present its position. Hopefully, the Newsletter will provide a forum for the differing points of view and broaden all our perspectives.

The beginning months of the B.C.F. have been most eventful. The Board of Directors has been formally constituted and includes-

Mr. T. N. Davidson
Mr. G. A. Wilson
Mr. D. F. Dineen
Mr. J. A. MacDonald
Mr. J. Lemire, Secretary

Administrative officers are:

Harry Silverman, Executive Director
Shirley McNaughton, Programme Director
Barbara Kates, Associate Programme Director

Staff Members include:

Jinny Storr, Programme Assistant
Carol Ashford, Administrative Assistant
Shirley McKee, Secretary

The B.C.F. office is located at 862 Eglinton Avenue E., Toronto, M4G 2L1
(Telephone 416-425-7835).

As reported in the first announcement of the B.C.F., the Foundation has been chartered as a non-profit organization. It has been given a perpetual world-wide licence by Charles K. Bliss for the purpose of ensuring the standardization of Blissymbolics. This agreement assigns, as one of the B.C.F.'s functions, responsibility for issuing sub-licences to all Centres actively involved in symbol programmes. Letters will be sent out shortly in this regard.

Due to the wide geographical spread and the need to decentralize consultant and workshop services, resource centres are being sub-licensed in selected locations. Sub-licences for resource centres being issued only to centres which have 2 years experience in symbol instruction as well as the qualified staff and facilities which enable them to offer workshop and consultant services.

The first resource centres to be functioning serve Western and Eastern Ontario. Elaine Jones, at the Sarnia and District Crippled Children's Centre, began an afternoon workshop series December 12, 1975. These workshop sessions are serving many areas of possible symbol application in Sarnia. The Ottawa Crippled Children's Centre will be holding its first workshop March 15, 16, 17. It will include sessions on the pre-school child, alternate non-verbal methods, and symbol usage by the institutionalized mentally retarded. Further information can be obtained by contacting Anne Warrick, c/o Ottawa Crippled Children's Treatment Centre, 395 Smyth Road, Ottawa, Ontario. K1G 3H9. Planning is underway with Keila Hunsinger for the Montreal Resource Centre. It is gratifying to see other organizations sharing the objectives of the B.C.F.

Negotiations for sub-licensing agreements are also currently underway for the production of teaching aids, children's books and research development.

Another responsibility of the B.C.F. is the distribution of a Bulletin to everyone on the B.C.F. mailing list. It will include details regarding availability of the materials, as well as information regarding the progress of the B.C.F.

A beginners' workshop co-sponsored by the B.C.F.-O.C.C.C. will be held April 6-9. This workshop is being extended to four days in response to the many requests for increased involvement and time to apply new learnings. Application forms are available from Mrs. Jinny Storr at the B.C.F.

We hope Mr. Symbol Man is now available in your local public library. If not, remind your librarian that it can be purchased or borrowed (in Canada) from the National Film Board of Canada local offices. In the U.S.A. it is available from:

The National Film Board of Canada,
16th Floor,
1251 Avenue of the Americas,
New York, New York, 10020.

Information regarding "Symbol Boy" can be obtained from:

Mr. George Lynes,
National Film Board of Canada,
550 Sherbrooke Street West,
Montreal, Quebec.

We hope that you like the new cover of the Newsletter. We look forward to "the gathering of information" about what you are doing, with each coming issue.

Barbara Kates
Shirley McNaughton

SYMBOLS and MATHEMATICS

Student: Girl, aged 13, athetoid, using 200 symbol board, and showing a sudden development in mathematical skills since using symbols.

Addition

Elaine will gather one inch cubes for the digits in the ones column, then total those,

giving answer on the board. She is then questioned as to which digit is placed in the answer and which carried to the next column. The answer is given on the board. Repeats process for next column.

Subtraction

To borrow in subtraction, Elaine uses the symbol "NOT" the next column but the digit one lower (using board for digits). In symbols "one" "up" "before" the digit in the first column. She has done this through four digits.

Multiplication

Elaine has just started this computation and she chose the symbol "gathering" for grouping each factor, "X" for multiplication, and "like, similar to" for the equal sign.

Math is now an interesting and rewarding experience for Elaine and she has frequently told me in symbols "I think math book lucky."

Ann Martin
Virginia Waters School
St. John's, Newfoundland

MR. SYMBOL MAN

One of the highlights of the Canadian Psychiatric Association Annual meeting held at Banff, Alberta in September 1975 was the movie, "Mr. Symbol Man". Tickets were issued to "the award winning National Film Board film", followed by a discussion led by George Lynes, distribution coordinator. Although the attendance was a mere 25-30 people, representing child psychiatry, psychology and para medics, the question and answer period was lively, and thought provoking. The range of questions varied from personal ones, regarding Mr. Lynes' own son, to academic -- will this communication board be tried with autistic children -- or, as a reading readiness tool with normal pre-schoolers. Personally, I was ecstatic when I saw the announcement in the calendar of events, and thoroughly involved and proud of the enthusiasm generated through the delightful film.

Alva Trossman
Symbol Instructor
C.P. Centre, Hamilton

SYNTAX - THE NEED FOR A CORRECT MODEL

(Excerpt from presentation at October 1975 Workshop)

The most important point that concerns us when planning a communication programme for the non-verbal child is how best can that child get his meaning across. Conveying meaning is what communication is all about. What I would like to discuss first is - can we convey meaning adequately without structure?

When we listen to one another talk, we do not listen carefully to every word uttered.

*faking for great structure must be given --
preparing child's white with non-symbolic points is this change just*

We are conditioned by grammatical probabilities so that the individual words are not as important, in conveying meaning, as their relationship to one another. We can follow a conversation despite noisy conditions, because we know what to expect when we hear certain words uttered. We know the sequence words must follow. We have developed considerable syntactical skills without any formal instruction.

If you tried to communicate without the normal sequence, you might well be understood, but it would place greater demands on the listener to follow every word. He is unable to judge your meaning by his own expectancy. For example: if you said:

"Home boy yesterday go"

It isn't until the very last word that you can see any relationship between the preceding words. If you didn't listen carefully you might interpret it incorrectly. This is what makes communication between people of different nationalities difficult. Not only do you have to listen carefully because of a distorted pronunciation, but also word order and grammatical errors can distort the meaning. Sequence and the correct relationship between words is, therefore, very important in conveying meaning easily.

So what relationship does this have to symbol communication? Any language is a symbol system. By definition, "A language is a system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community. The physically handicapped child who cannot speak, is unable to make use of the phonemic and phonological signals for transmitting language. That is, he cannot make the sounds of speech. We have replaced these signals with Bliss symbols. Already the child is becoming removed from his language community. However, by using the written word under the symbol there is some transfer of meaning. If we now instigate a new syntactical structure, the child will be using a completely new language and will no longer be part of his community. Communication between him and speaking people will be like communicating in two different languages. It will be necessary to attend carefully and make guesses at the meaning he is attempting to convey. If we can retain the syntax of the language community, whether it be English, French or any other language, when using the Bliss symbols, the children will be less removed from their peers and will have a common bond of understanding despite the physical difficulty in communicating.

will always be poor friends.

In the normal speaking child, production of language through speech, plays an important part in learning language. Children understand some language long before they speak, but it is the speaking process that helps the child test out what he has heard and by trial and error and with the use of correct models, he develops a full understanding of the structure and meaning of language. The non-verbal child, who may have no difficulty in taking in language, cannot develop a full understanding of language and its structure because of the lack of practise in language output. Gestures, picture boards and word-boards provide a very simple concrete method of expression but do nothing to help the child to understand the complexities of language. Reading would, perhaps provide more insight into language for the child, but by the time he has reached the level of reading readiness, he has passed the critical stage for learning language.

or can not use words naturally.

In my opinion, the child who may be using Bliss symbols for communication, should be introduced to the structure of language output, as early as possible, as is the normal speaking child. As soon as the child can be conditioned to LOOK, even if he cannot yet indicate symbols, the symbols should be used by the speaker, in conjunction with speech. In this way, the child can develop an understanding of the boards use in communication. He will become familiar with the position and sequence of symbols prior to any demands for output on his part. This can be done in the same way as with the normal child, who is not yet speaking. When reading stories, looking at pictures etc., use short simple sentences and indicate them on the board while speaking. e.g. See the boy (present tense, to see the boy). Increase the length and complexity of the sequence as the child's own output develops. All children learn language by example. Even the hard-of-hearing child

attitude toward phys. hand. or any disability. Must they move to the majority position as
one of the main things to be taught is the concept of something different.

learns to use sign language by watching others despite efforts by some people to prevent it. It is the motivation to communicate that determines the success of learning language, not the amount of formal teaching.

The advantage that the Bliss board has over other types of communication board and over sign languages is that it is the closest to spoken language in it's ability to convey abstract thought and new ideas, as well as more simple, concrete communication. It's disadvantage is the time taken to communicate. However, I feel that we should develop the symbol systems potential as a language medium to its full. This can be done by helping the children develop language as closely as possible to their peers.

All normal speaking persons use two different methods of communicating verbally. When speaking formally, a more complete grammatically correct form of communication is used. The meaning of the utterances are contained within the structure and sequence, as well as the vocabulary used. A second form of communication takes place in more informal situations, as in chats between friends. Here the utterances are short and often incomplete and the meaning is conveyed through context, gesture, facial expression and, most important through past experience of language usage. That is through expectancy. A conversation may consist entirely of one-word utterances. e.g.

Whatcha doing?

Building.

What?

Guess.

Can't.

*Why not expect
implied structure
in phase
equivalent?*

The use of complete sentences is absent but the meaning is clear to the communicators because of the implied structure. This type of informal communication is not comparable to the one-word utterances of the 18 month old child. With one word a young child can mean a multitude of things and the listener has to guess the correct meaning, using situational clues. In the older persons use of one-word utterances, the meaning is usually clear because of our knowledge of language and the rules governing its use. We do not have to depend so much on non-language clues. Therefore to communicate in a shortened, incomplete form, a sound background knowledge of the structure of language is necessary. If an utterance is not understood by the listener, the speaker can enlarge on it or modify it to make the meaning clear. This also requires a knowledge of the rules of language, in order to be able to re-word something.

If the Bliss-using child can learn the rules of syntax and can use complete, syntactically correct utterances on the board, then he is on a level with others in his language community. He will then be independent in the area of communication. He will have the choice of using short, incomplete utterances, or more lengthy grammatically correct utterances, according to the situation. If he is not understood he will have the skill and knowledge to modify or enlarge on what he has said. Once he has a sound knowledge of language, he will, hopefully, develop a system of communicating that is most efficient for himself.

I don't think it is up to us to discover the most efficient means of communicating for the handicapped child using the symbols. It is up to us to give the child as much knowledge of language as possible and help him develop skill in the use of symbols. Once he has developed this skill and knowledge, it is up to him to adapt it to his own individuality. In spontaneous communication, what is produced, no matter how incorrectly as regards syntax, should be accepted by the listener, if the meaning is clear. As far as possible, the Bliss using child should be treated the same as the speaking child as regards to correction of utterances. Correcting syntax should not be done during a conversation,

2 agree - but we have a responsibility to correct the syntax in the most effective way

*Our "model" responsibility - to show the best. I think this is showing the best the visual syst
can offer.*

as spontaneity is something we are striving for. However, if the speaking person will use the symbols while speaking, the child will be exposed to the correct syntax, in the same way the speaking child HEARS syntax used correctly. We could possibly demand more accuracy in communication during formal teaching situations as with the speaking child.

The learning of syntax by the Bliss using child shouldn't be so difficult if he is exposed to it consistently. Spontaneity of communication and motivation to communicate shouldn't be hindered if we react to the child in the same way as we do to the speaking child. That is, by listening and looking at what he has to say, by showing interest, by not correcting or making him say it over again, by making constructive guesses if we don't understand and, most of all, by giving him the correct model.

Jill Bechard
Speech Pathologist
Kitchener

by ask:
the right person
to make a
constructive
guess

as a sign
of
sign

SYMBOLS AND A MODEL SYNTAX

(Excerpt from presentation at October '75 Workshop)

All of us are involved in the application of Blissymbols as a medium of communication for the child unable to speak. We should be concerned with how to improve the communication between the symbol-user and those he is talking to, and one important consideration here is the way in which the child himself experiences the symbols; how the people around him use the symbols to talk to him. The patterns which lie behind the adult's sentences as he talks or writes with symbols I will call the "model syntax", which he "presents" to the child.

PERSPECTIVE

An act of communication involves two participant roles, a sender, and a receiver. The sender might be someone pointing to symbols. The receiver could be a person interpreting the symbols indicated. For communication to be efficient, the sender and receiver need to share a common set of conventions: they must "know the same language".

Any spoken language is a complex structure of interrelated systems. It has a semantics, a lexicon, a grammar (which includes both morphology and syntax), and a phonology and phonetics. Semantics refers to the way in which a language divides and categorises objects, events, and relationships - the "meaning" of the words and structures of the language. Phonology and phonetics describe the language's sound system. And the Lexicon and grammar together are the instrument which translate meaning into sound, or vice versa: the lexicon is the vocabulary of the language, its list of words and meaningful elements, morphology defines the structure of its words (for instance in English, "saw" not "seed" is the past tense of "to see"; "children", not "childs" is the plural of "child"); and the syntax governs the structure of its sentences, how the words combine to produce grammatical wholes. Thus, "Not I yesterday saw you" is ungrammatical English, but "I didn't see you yesterday" is standard. "John loves Mary" does not mean the same as "Mary loves John".

The order of words in a given language follows no predetermined logic, universal to all languages: What in English is "John loves Mary", in Gaelic would have the order "loves John Mary", in Japanese "John Mary loves", and in some languages like Latin, all six possible permutations would be permissible, all with the same basic meaning. "I want to go to the theatre tomorrow" in German might be "Tomorrow want I to the theatre go". And "the book on the box" would be almost exactly the reverse in Japanese: "box on book the".

So each language has its own idiosyncratic rules of grammar; and literal word-for-word translation from one language to another will lead to ambiguities and misunderstandings. To learn a language includes learning its syntax; and to invent a new language includes inventing a syntax for it.

Written languages have a "graphemics" (system of written characters). The graphemics may relate to the lexicon of language through its sound system (as in the case of an alphabetical writing system like conventional written English, or a syllabic system like Eskimo syllabics). Or it may relate directly to the meanings of the words without reference to their pronunciation (as in the case of the basic Chinese characters, or our written numerals (1,2,3, etc. - or Blissymbols).

Although we may feel that an alphabetical system is the most advanced or natural or logical way of representing a language, its purely an accident of history that English is written this way. There is in principle no reason why English should not be

written using a pictographic-ideographic system such as Chinese, or Blissymbols.

Bliss' symbols can be seen as a graphic lexicon, with fairly loosely defined meanings attached to each symbol, begging for a syntax to set it into action. The syntax could be entirely independent of any spoken language, so that one could then talk of a Bliss-symbol language. Or it could be the syntax of English: the symbols would then be simply another way of writing English.

Two preliminary distinctions should be kept in mind.

Firstly, the model syntax and the syntax which the child is expected to use himself need not be one and the same thing. The teacher might be following the full structure and idiom of English without demanding that his symbol-student use the same fullness of expressions.

For instance the teacher or adult might point out, or write:

I	+	^2	>	^	>1	/	□8	>>	8□	\	○2
I, me	possessive	brother	past	walk, go	to	the	store	in order to	buy	a, an	record

while from the child, the following could be perfectly adequate to express the same idea:-

^2	^	□8	8□	○2
brother	walk, go	store	buy	record

Apart from "baby-talk", adults tend to use fully grammatical structures when talking to small children. But we do not expect these children already to have mastered the complexities of the language in their own speech.

Secondly, we ought to identify more carefully who we have in mind in terms of sender and receiver when we are proposing any particular syntax. Either child or adult might be sender or receiver. At one end we may have a child without speech, but characterised also by a wide range of physical and intellectual abilities. At the other end might be the child's parent or teacher; it might be someone seeing the symbols for the first time; or it might be a fellow symbol-user in the next wheelchair.

In this discussion I am concerned with an informed adult (e.g.: teacher) in the role of sender, and the child without speech in the role of receiver. I argue that English is the most appropriate model syntax to present to the C.P. population most of us are now working with.

NORMAL CHILD AND SYMBOL CHILD

The situation of the child who is learning to express himself through symbols presents striking differences from the normal case of a child learning to speak:

1. the symbols are graphic and therefore occupy two-dimensional space: they must be arranged so that the child can indicate them in some way and so that the person he is talking to is able to see them clearly;

2. as a consequence of the limitation of space, the size of the vocabulary is artificially limited;
3. the selection of the symbols on the display is controlled by the adults who provide it; and expansion of the child's expressive vocabulary depends not so much on his own requirements and capacity to learn as on the decisions (or whims!) of the adults governing his programme.
4. even the child's access to his expressive language depends on how willing others around him are to let him talk - we can remove his opportunity to converse simply by removing or withholding his display. Some symbol children have been left unable to talk for long periods, perhaps an entire summer, because they could not reach their boards.
5. the speed of output, of pointing to the symbols, is determined by the child's handicap, and perhaps also by the receiver's ability to read and interpret what he is saying,-- but even in the fastest case it is still very much slower than the rate of normal speech.

MODE OF RECEPTION - MODE OF EXPRESSION

But the most crucial difference for our discussion has to do with the distinction between mode of expression (the form in which one "sends" language e.g. speech, or writing or morse code and mode of reception (the form in which one "receives" language).

For the normal child learning to speak, mode of expression and mode of reception are the same. He hears others talking, he is learning to speak too, and he hears himself talking. The language he hears around him serves as a model for his own developing skills of expression, and the acquisition of spoken language follow as character the progression which can be seen as a gradual movement closer and closer to the adult patterns of speech.

The child with symbols on the other hand hears spoken language all around him, but he is expected to point to symbols: receptive and expressive language therefore take completely different forms. As things seem to stand now in the world of children using Blissymbols, compared with the amount of spoken language they hear, they are exposed to very, very little symbol usage by other people. (The symbol usage they do experience receptively could take the form of previously printed material, such as a letter or a story, or of the teacher actively writing symbols on the blackboard, or of someone communicating in their manner of expression, in other words pointing around to symbols on a display).

There is (at least as yet) no community of adult symbol users. There is no established convention as to how symbols should be strung together - no symbol grammar. And whatever symbol usage by adults the child does see, this is likely to be inconsistent and stumbling, and quite without the regularity and rhythm of natural speech.

Wheelchairs and trays form to some extent a barrier which frustrates the requirement of being close enough to read the symbols. This separates most symbol-users (or word-board users for that matter) from others like them, and so hinders the spontaneous development of grammatical patterns amongst the symbol-using population. Furthermore the need for feedback, to know that he has been correctly understood, is probably less adequately satisfied when a symbol child is talking to another symbol-child than when he is talking to an adult who can immediately check whether he has "got the right message" or not.

If we wish a child to develop his skill in expressing himself through symbols as rapidly and smoothly as possible, then we must offer him a model syntax in his own medium. The normal child does not learn the patterns of his language in a receptive vacuum, and we should not expect the symbol-user to either.

MOTHER - TONGUE AS MODEL

One great asset that the symbol-user has is that he already has a mother-tongue, at least receptively. If he can't be called a "native speaker", at least he is a "native listener".

The advantage here is that English (or of course any other natural language) already has established conventions for expressing the full range of human experience, and for making subtle distinctions of meaning. If you are proposing an entirely independent syntax for symbols, you must not only formulate rules of syntax and specify how they relate to the real world, but you must also teach the teachers these rules and relationships and make sure that they understand them thoroughly.

Apart from the difficulty of instructing the teachers, teaching a child a syntax which diverges from the language of those around him is likely to cause confusion and frustration when he is talking to anyone but the initiated.

But if the child can transfer his receptive knowledge of English (or French, or Portuguese as the case may be) to his own active mode of expression so that the symbols follow the same sequence as corresponding English words, he will be making a natural step in his linguistic development--in fact he will be starting to talk in English.

There are interesting indications that at least most of the children at the O.C.C.C. do associate their symbols with the English words appearing beneath them. In spite of strong emphasis in the classroom on the semantic relationship of symbol to its meaning, many of the children unhesitatingly use the symbol as though it relates to the sound of the word. This happens when they try to express words for which they have no symbol, but when a symbol for a word sounding the same is available. Thus the symbol for "present tense" is used for a "present" or "gift" as in "a present for you";

)(	>>	12
present (now)	for	you

The symbol for a "show" or "theatre", is used as the homophonous verb:

"show (this to the) teacher:

△○	1↑△
show	teacher

the verb "to stick or attach" has been used for a stick (piece of wood),

as in "he threw the stick far"

Λ3	(gesture "throw")
he, him	

^	∨
attach	far
stick	

and the verb "to go" is used to represent the past as in "a long time ago".

$\checkmark \rightarrow$	$\odot$	$\hat{\Delta}$
long	time	walk, go

Kari is the child at the O.C.C.C. with the fullest sentence form. Although her sentences can still be characterised as "telegraphic", like the output of most of the other children it is clearly related to spoken English. This is especially evident from the use of idiomatic English expressions--

"he took my shoes off"

λ_3	$\hat{-}$	$\perp_1$	$\hat{\Delta}$	$\downarrow$	γ
he,him	take away	I, me	shoes	opposite	on

(as well as "he took off my shoes")

λ_3	$\hat{-}$	$\downarrow$	γ	$\perp_1$	$\hat{\Delta}$	$\rangle$
he,him	take away	opposite	on	I, me	shoes	past

-- where French might have "he me take shoes" or German "he pull me shoes out", or the

English "he has a cold"

λ_3	$\hat{\pm}$	$\downarrow$	$\langle \rangle$
he,him	have	opposite	hot

which would not be understood in French or German.

And in the case where we formulated a rule which differs plainly from English-- how to make up "combined symbols"--the children persist in using the English type order. Thus they say "marry woman" for "wife" instead of the prescribed "woman marry".

Because of the nature of its grammar, which relies far more on syntactic than morphological variation, English lends itself readily to representation through symbols. (Apart from the severely restricted vocabulary available on a given display), the main problem in translating English symbol for word into Blissymbols lies in the English verb system, which does depend heavily on morphological as well as syntactic devices. How, for instance, should you represent the following distinctions in symbols? he comes; he is coming; he has come; he came; he had come; he's going to come; etc.

or:

He sees; he has seen; he was seen; he is seeing; he is being seen; etc.

However this is a small difficulty compared with the ease with which English can be written in symbols otherwise.

S U M M A R Y

In brief, I feel it is important that the adults around a child learning to talk with symbols should present consistent and fluent symbol usage. This means that the adults ought to be confident and fluent in the model syntax.

The most appropriate form for such a syntax to take would seem to be that of the spoken language of the environment - English in an English setting, French in a French setting. To follow the syntax of a language both children and adults already know will involve the least complicated learning for everyone concerned, and will enable the children to talk to the greatest variety of people in that environment with the least frustration.

The question of how the children should be expected to talk back is a matter for another debate. It would of course depend to some extent on the child's degree of physical involvement. Some form of drill in sentence patterning, or other remedial language training would be warranted in some cases. But I suspect that in general the child of normal intelligence, presented with regular, consistent and confident usage of the symbols by his teachers, etc., would come to discover for himself the style of expression which suits his own needs best.

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